New Application Areas for Soft Systems Methodology in the Information Age

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ABSTRACT

Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) is now 40 years old. Another decade has passed since Checkland's thirty-year retrospective on the methodology published in 2000. It can now be described as an old methodology. But it has adapted and changed over the years and is still very much alive, although the days are long gone when it was mainly developed and practised by its founders at the University of Lancaster and even mainly in the UK. Interestingly, considering that many applications of SSM over the years have been to information systems, it was developed before the age of personal computers and the Internet.

The way SSM is viewed has changed over the years as it has been applied to various types of problem situation. Every use of SSM will potentially hold methodological lessons in addition to those about the situation of concern; these may include SSM's framework of ideas, processes and way of use. How is SSM going to change in the future? This will depend in part on the types of problem situation to which it is applied. This paper will examine some problem situations associated with the information age to which SSM has not yet been much applied. These include computer simulation and virtual reality, ubiquitous computing and the design of cities, IT service management and the design of enterprise information architectures. Some of the different worldviews associated with these problem situations, which could be explored using SSM, are noted.